



Katy Schneider
&
Henry Heuser, Jr
Co-Chairs

April 5, 2013

Greg Fischer, Mayor
Louisville Metro Hall
527 W. Jefferson St.
Louisville, KY 40202

Dear Mayor Fischer,

As Co-Chair of the Louisville Metro Tree Advisory Commission, I am asking for your feedback and direction. Over a year and a half ago, you agreed to create a tree board for Louisville. Your board, formed as an advisory commission, has just completed its first year and needs your guidance regarding its future.

This letter serves as an annual report by enumerating the Commission's accomplishments in its first year. In spite of the Commission being only advisory with no actual authority, it has, I believe, helped raise awareness within Metro and the broader community of the importance of our tree canopy and the urgent need to make a concerted effort to protect, preserve and increase it. Our accomplishments include:

- Last June, with financial support from Christy Brown, we sponsored Dr. Brian Stone's visit to Louisville and his talk as part of the Urban Design Studio's Sustainable City series. Major articles appeared in the local media about his urban heat island research, particularly findings specific to Louisville, and his emphasis on the vital importance of trees in mitigating the effects of urban heat islands.
- With virtually no resources, the Commission has helped spearhead fifteen neighborhood based tree planting projects including Re-Tree Dundee, the African American Heritage Center, the Flaget Center, Cane Run Road, Auburndale and many more throughout the city. These initiatives, along with the half dozen or so already in planning for the fall planting season, demonstrate how to involve residents as tree champions and to encourage neighborhoods to value and protect their tree canopies.
- There is also a pilot tree education project underway with students and faculty at Moore High School. This approach builds a foundation for future tree stewards, ensuring the trees planted today will be maintained in the future.

- The Policy Committee of the Commission has made recommendations to a subcommittee of the Land Development Code Improvement Committee for revisions to Chapter 10 Part 1, which deals with tree canopy requirements. Commission members and supporters are talking with members of the development community at this subcommittee's meetings in an effort to reach agreement on the recommended changes where possible.
- The Inventory and Scientific Committee is in the final draft of an RFP for a tree canopy assessment and analysis to provide a much needed roadmap of where we are and where we need to go in terms of increasing our canopy. This will allow future tree planting projects to be targeted for areas where trees can have the most impact in terms of decreasing the urban heat island effect and managing storm water runoff.
- We hosted the Kentucky Department of Forestry's statewide tree board conference, which included education sessions on the threat of emerald ash borer and Asian longhorn beetle.
- The Commission has developed a PowerPoint presentation on the benefits of trees, purpose of the Commission, and steps urgently needed to increase our tree canopy. Members of the Commission have spoken to community groups and, most recently, to the Sustainability Committee of the Louisville Metro Council.
- The former Community of Trees web page has been revamped to serve as the Commission's page.
- The Commission has met monthly and invited Wes Sydnor, an MSD engineer; Phil Bills, Director of Planning; Charles Cash, Frankfort Avenue Streetscape Master Plan; Dan Jones, 21st Century Parks; Dr. Brian Stone, Professor, Georgia Tech Urban and Regional Planning Department; Peter Barber, Kentucky State Department of Forestry and others to present.

Obviously, the Commission has been active, but at this point, Commission members are unsure how and if we can proceed with seemingly no real connection to you and your agenda. Henry Heuser, Jr., my fellow Commission Co-Chair and I met with you and Ted Smith in late August of 2012 to "advise" the administration of actions the Commission believed were needed "to protect, preserve, and grow Louisville's trees," Since then, the Commission has had no direct communication with you or substantive feedback from your staff regarding those recommendations (referenced below and attached). There is concern that this lack of a response is bringing the Commission to a standstill.

- The Commission asked that an **urban forester** be hired and fully dedicated to supporting its work. Fortunately, thanks to Ted Smith, the Commission has the staff support of Michelle King and others at the Air Pollution Control District as well as Sherie Long at Planning and Design, as we could not have functioned without them. They both happen to have a personal commitment to the Commission's mission and regularly go beyond their job descriptions and office hours to support us. More importantly in terms of staff, however, is the need for a qualified **urban forester** (not the same as a city arborist) who is a certified arborist and has experience engaging communities in growing and caring for trees

and with long-term planning for the overall health of the urban forest. We actually recommended an individual to you for this position.

- The Commission is advisory and lacks permanence. I am well aware that it was expedient to create the Commission by Executive Order, but an effort to make this entity permanent with some authority to act needs to be underway now in the drafting of a **Tree Protection Ordinance**. Revisions to specific sections of the Land Development Code is a necessary first step that the Commission is tackling now with volunteers, but legal resources, either contracted and/or in house, need to be brought to bear in the creation of such an ordinance. This type of ordinance is already in place in many of our peer cities, especially those with robust tree canopies of the sort that we are aiming to achieve.
- Multiple efforts by Henry, Allen Steinbock, the Treasurer/Secretary of the Commission, and myself have been made to create a permanent **non-profit tree fund** as called for in your Executive Order. Over the past 10 months, we have approached the Community Foundation of Louisville and The Center for Neighborhoods to house a fund and met with a County Attorney about forming a free standing 501(c)(3) with no success for a variety of reasons. Included in Henry's and my recommendations was the suggestion of re-positioning Brightside to be the tree focused non-profit; however, at that time you did not want us to pursue that option. In the meantime, we have missed opportunities to receive grants and donations and have been frustrated in carrying out projects where neighborhood residents wanted to contribute or for which we needed financing.
- With an RFP almost in hand for a **tree canopy analysis**, the approximately \$300,000 necessary to fund it now needs to be raised. The Commission would prefer and is willing to raise private monies through a 501(c)(3), but will also seek contributions from public sources, i.e., Metro, MSD and the KY Division of Forestry. The Commission needs your "blessing" of this project in order to proceed. Your approval must signify not just a willingness and commitment of resources to creating the plan but also to implementing it.
- I know that you are well aware of the imminent threat to our ash trees from **emerald ash borer**. A committee of the Commission has written a position paper outlining this threat, but as of yet, there is no plan on how to combat this devastating pest. Without the resources to perform an inventory of ash trees in order to document their locations and their condition, it is impossible to outline the steps and estimated costs to addressing this looming threat. One approach that has been considered is the hiring of University of Kentucky Forestry Department interns this summer to conduct an inventory of ash trees that would include at least the urban services district where they are more likely to pose a public safety threat due to more dense development patterns. A representative of Parks was looking into this possibility but reported back that his department does not have the budget to hire them, necessary vehicles to lend them, or available staff to supervise them. So at this point, we have no plan for handling this serious public safety issue.

Two recent occurrences have also caused Commission members to question whether you still see a need for the Commission in your administration. First, the setting of

community tree planting goals included in your sustainability plan with no input from or involvement of the Tree Commission was baffling. Is the Commission responsible for tracking and meeting these goals? I understand that the pledge of 10,000 trees was made during your campaign, but it seems both appropriate and beneficial for you or your staff to have discussed the basis of and plans for accomplishing this goal with the Tree Commission. Secondly, it now appears that Brightside is going to focus more on trees and is submitting a proposal for 100 trees to MSD. Given this new direction for Brightside's work, should the Commission continue to pursue the establishment of a separate nonprofit organization focused on trees? This apparent adjustment of Brightside's mission is of obvious interest to the Commission so that at the very least we do not work at cross purposes, and ideally we would work together in support of common goals. The absence of the Tree Commission in these discussions related to trees begs again the question of what you see as its purpose.

Based on the Commission's first year and recommendations for moving forward, the question is simple: do you want this entity to continue? Are you willing to ensure a stronger communication link with your office and more regular feedback from you and your staff? If not, the Commission has no meaningful role to play in your administration. Until we hear from you regarding the Commission's future, we will not proceed with making recommendations to fill some currently vacant seats.

I know you are addressing many challenges on multiple fronts, and on behalf of the Commission, I truly appreciate your taking the time to consider its future.

Sincerely,

Katy Schneider
Co-Chair
Louisville Metro Advisory Tree Commission

Cc: Henry Heuser, Jr., Co-Chair